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Laveen residents await decision on planned freeway

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The Arizona Republic
Sept. 27, 2006 12:00 AM

Spread along a dirt road aptly named Dusty Lane in Laveen sits one half of the South Mountain Freeway fight that has riled opponents on the other side of the mountain.

But unlike many opponents in Ahwatukee Foothills, these Laveen residents have been relatively mum on the proposed alignment. They've been no-shows at many community meetings. They haven't written letters to the editor opposing the plan. Some even relish the thought that they are sitting in the path of a 10-lane freeway.

"It's kind of like, 'Come on, make an offer,' " said Pam Hare, a Laveen resident who shares a double-wide mobile home with her husband and their five children.

"We have no choice. It's going to come through whether we oppose it or not."

A final decision about the South Mountain Freeway (Loop 202) hasn't been made, although plans appear to be jelling and preparations are accelerating after 20 years of talk. The Arizona Department of Transportation is readying a draft environmental impact statement to be released in the spring.

Envisioned as a 22-mile bypass around downtown Phoenix, the freeway would link Interstate 10 in the southeast Valley with I-10 in the West Valley. ADOT estimates the freeway's price tag at \$1.7 billion and its completion in late 2015.

The proposed alignment is along Pecos Road in Ahwatukee and cuts through the western edge of the South Mountain Preserve to link to 55th Avenue in Laveen.

Over the years, there has been talk of moving the alignment onto the Gila River Reservation, but the community has barred ADOT from studying that option.

Several hundred homes in Ahwatukee Foothills are in the path of the proposed freeway. But so are about 20 homes in the Dusty Lane community.

The proposed alignment through Phoenix doesn't surprise Hare, 39, a nursing assistant for Hospice of the Valley.

She and her family have lived on a 2-acre parcel in the path of the freeway for five years ever since the city bought her husband's single-family home to build a waterline.

"Here's my house," she said, placing a Sharpie pen on her kitchen island to use as a prop.

"Here's the freeway," she said, laying a long candle lighter across the pen.

Hare said she has no sympathy for opponents of the freeway plan.

"Talk of this freeway has been going on for years," she said. "You buy in the path, and you pay the consequences."

For some landowners, they could be bought out by ADOT if they are in the "take zone."

That's what Laveen homeowner Felipe Arellano is hoping for.

Last year, Arellano had a 4,000-square-foot home built near Dusty Lane and Ivanhoe Street. He estimates the five-bedroom, three-bathroom home with a three-car garage is worth about \$700,000.

"It's my dream home," he said. "But as long as they (the government) pay me good money for my house, it's not a problem. I would just move somewhere else."

So would Arthur Nephew, who is medically retired from the Army and lives in a double-wide mobile home on the southern end of Dusty Lane just east of the Vee Quiva Casino, owned by the Gila River Indian Community.

Nephew, who shares the home with his wife and teenage daughter, has lived on the 5-acre parcel for about 2½ years.

Until recently, Nephew drove his 17-year-old daughter, Arthrina, to Mountain Pointe High School in Ahwatukee. With no direct route to the other side of South Mountain, the Nephews had to drive 25 miles each way around the mountain to get there. Arthrina, a junior, now drives herself.

"It would be so much easier with a freeway," he said.

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